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U.S. Said Trying to Stir Irrational Act by Gadhafi

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The Reagan administration is waging a war of nerves against Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi under a plan devised in the White House earlier this month that seeks to scare him into an irrational reaction, informed sources said yesterday.

The U.S. plan reportedly arose from meetings in late July between Secretary of State George P. Shultz and CIA Director William J. Casey after receipt of an intelligence report—later proved to be suspect—that Gadhafi had acted uncontrollably in an early July meeting with Yemeni leaders.

According to this account, administration officials discussed, but discarded, the deliberate creation of harmless but unsettling sonic booms in Libya by maneuvers of U.S. warplanes as part of the scare campaign against Gadhafi.

A lengthy and detailed Wall Street Journal article Monday reporting that "the United States and Libya are on a collision course again" was attributed by officials in several agencies to staff members of the National Security Council, where the "scare Gadhafi" program is reported to have been drawn up. Earlier plans reportedly called for U.S. efforts to plant stories in foreign publications that Gadhafi became unhinged by the U.S. air raid of April 15 and that plots to overthrow him were under way.

The objective of the U.S. words and deeds is to frighten Gadhafi into reacting and to embolden possible opponents in Libya into action, according to a knowledgeable source.

In view of this objective, senior administration officials have been pleased with the alarmist reactions of the Soviet Union and Libya to the long-planned joint U.S.-Egyptian air exercises now taking place in the Mediterranean. U.S. news reports of the forthcoming European trip of U.N. Ambassador Vernon Walters,

which also was planned well in advance, have helped create an impression that new U.S. actions against Libya are likely.

Defense Department sources said yesterday that the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean is not mobilizing

or any kind of attack on Libya, despite tough talk in Washington. The sources said, however, that the fleet might conduct another set of flight maneuvers in the Tripoli Flight Information Region off Libya after completing the U.S.-Egyptian Sea Wind exercise on Thursday.

It the latest in a series of moves that fueled speculation about impending U.S. military action, it was reported yesterday that a planned port visit in Israel this weekend of the USS Forrestal has been canceled and that the aircraft carrier has been ordered to remain on duty in the central Mediterranean near Libya.

Following the completion of Sea Wind with Egypt, the Forrestal had been scheduled to go into the Israeli port of Haifa. But military sources said new orders were issued amid reports in Washington that Gadhafi was planning new terrorist acts that might impel U.S. military action.

The Associated Press quoted an unnamed administration official as saying that the new orders amount to "a bit of saber rattling." The AP said the official added, "You could also say we're playing some head games. There have been suggestions that Gadhafi's government might be vulnerable internally. We're working to scare his people too."

The only significant military response to the flight operations the Forrestal conducted off Libya on the way to the Sea Wind exercise was monitoring by Soviet antisubmarine aircraft, officials said.

Intelligence officials have recently issued warnings that Libya has been practicing with Scud missiles in antiship firings into the Gulf of Sidra. Soviet-supplied Scud B missiles were fired at a barge in the gulf in July, sources said, prompting intelligence reports that Gadhafi might resort to this weapon if U.S. ships should cross the "line of death" he has drawn across the gulf.

The State Department, meanwhile, formally announced that Walters' Libya-relat-

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ed trip to Western European capitals would start this weekend.

Walters' talks in Europe "will include a full exchange of information concerning Libya and will cover the full range of political, economic and diplomatic measures we and our allies have been taking jointly and individually," said State Department spokesman Charles E. Redman.

Other officials said Walters hopes to exchange assessments with European governments on the situation in Libya since the April 15 U.S. bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi.

Another Walters objective, according to State Department sources, is to assess the effect of economic measures taken against Libya by various western countries since the U.S. air strikes. European countries have taken various unheralded steps to reduce their trade with Libya and forgo loans to that country, according to officials here.

The impact has been substantial, according to the officials, but probably more for economic reasons than political reasons. A State Department official said, for example, that Libya's dollar-denominated proceeds from oil sales had been cut about in half since last year because of plummeting oil prices and the decline of the dollar against European currencies. The actual volume of Libyan oil sold abroad has not changed much, the official said.